

Multi-Bomb U.S. Missile Being Built

One Weapon Can Hit Targets Hundreds Of Miles Apart

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The United States knows how to use a single missile to destroy several different cities or military bases spaced hundreds of miles apart.

This is one of the major but unspoken reasons why Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara wants to rely on such offensive weapons rather than build an anti-missile defense.

The new missile technique revitalizes the "massive retaliation" policy of the Eisenhower years and changes the way of figuring how strong the United States is compared to the Soviet Union.

Curtain Lifted

The technique is called MIRV—an abbreviation for Multiple Individually-targetable Reentry Vehicle. The term is considered highly secret in the Pentagon.

But U.S. officials themselves lifted the curtain recently by confirming that the Minuteman 3 and Poseidon missiles will carry multiple warheads.

This let the cat out of the bag for Soviet missile experts, who have been reading about MIRV contracts in the trade press. It did not, however, tell the American public why the multiple-warhead technique is so significant.

Carries Several Bombs

With MIRV, a single missile can carry several small hydrogen bombs, each aimed at a different target. This takes precise, complicated guidance—now technologically within reach.

Using MIRV, a missile becomes much like the strategic bombers of the massive retaliation era. It can dump its load of bombs on one target or hit several.

MIRV also calls for a "new math" in missile counting. It is no secret that the U.S. strategic missile force is set at 1000 Minuteman and 54 Titan ICBMs backed up by 41 submarines, each carrying 16 Polaris type missiles.

But with the new Minuteman and Poseidon missiles carrying a number of warheads, the old missile count just covers the launching vehicle—not the bombs.

This is why McNamara said in his annual military budget statement last week that in comparing U.S. and Soviet missile strength, "it is not the number of missiles which is important, but rather the character of the payloads they carry; the missile is simply the delivery vehicle."

He also said the Pentagon planned to spend \$400 million on the improved version of Minuteman to counter "a possible strong Soviet ABM defense . . ." The Defense Secretary said it would cost the Soviets "many times more" than the \$400 million to upgrade their defenses to stop Minuteman.

Similarly, McNamara said the Pentagon planned to spend \$3.3 billion to build Poseidon missiles and install them on an undisclosed number of nuclear submarines. Of this total, \$900 million is in the Fiscal 1968 budget.

This proposed outlay for defense—penetrating Minuteman and Poseidon missiles comes to \$3.7 billion—as much, as the Pentagon estimates, it would cost to build a "thin" missile defense around the United States. McNamara estimates it would cost \$3.5 billion to build an "austere" defense against Red Chinese missiles.

This choice of where to spend the Pentagon's money dramatizes the faith McNamara has in MIRV and other penetration aids to keep the U.S. offense ahead of any Russian defense.

But he is hedging his bet further through a secret study called Strat X. This is a group of engineers and other weapons specialists working on the problem of where the United States should go next in strategic missile. Their headquarters is the Institute for Defense Analyses in Arlington.

A major concern is how to protect U.S. missiles from a first strike. Some weapons

experts believe the present concrete silos encasing Minuteman and Titan are not enough. The enemy has time to target them accurately because they do not move.

If Minuteman and Titan missiles were knocked out the United States would rely on bombers and Polaris missiles for its counterattack. But some weapons experts feel that this might not assure the same kind of accuracy as Minuteman in case the political decision at that moment was to hit only military bases—not cities.

The Strat X recommendations could start the United States developing a brand new type of missile or just improving on the present family. Much will depend on the progress in reaching an arms agreement with the Soviet Union.

There is money in the Pentagon's new budget for a start on a new ICBM—another example of McNamara's stress on offense.

The next few months will tell whether Congress, which voted last year for a faster pace on the Nike X missile defense for the United States, can be convinced that MIRV and other penetration techniques make an antimissile system, a poor investment.

There is evidence that the

Soviet leadership is split, also, on the offense vs. defense question. Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky, in an article in the journal, "Kommunist," wrote recently that "paramount attention is being given to the development of strategic rocket forces and of nuclear armed submarines which have the means to deter an aggressor and to decisively destroy him . . ." There was no mention of the Soviet missile defense system being installed, an omission which some Washington Kremlinologists found significant.